



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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NOAA'S NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE ILLUMINATES LIGHTNING SAFETY INFORMATION *Agency and Partners Kick-off Lightning Awareness Week*

Every crack of thunder that echoes from a storm is caused by lightning jetting across the sky or to the ground with a potentially lethal force. NOAA's National Weather Service along with its government, academic and private partners are educating Americans on the dangers of lightning and ways to stay safe during its annual Lightning Safety Awareness Week, June 19-25, 2005.

Cloud-to-ground lightning strikes within the United States an average of 25 million times every year. A single bolt, with a length that can exceed five miles and a width of one to two inches, can generate 100 million electrical volts and a temperature near 50,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

"Lightning is a potential hazard to people outdoors and indoors and results in millions of dollars in economic losses," said Brig. Gen. David L. Johnson, U.S. Air Force (Ret.), director of NOAA's National Weather Service. "Lightning kills an average of 67 people in the United States each year and can result in property loss, damage to aircraft and electronics, and can be the spark that ignites devastating wildfires."

Exceeding the number of fatalities are the estimated 600-700 lightning survivors that are left with debilitating health effects each year. "While about 90 percent of those struck by lightning survive, they frequently have permanent after effects such as chronic pain, brain injury and thought processing problems," said Dr. Mary Ann Cooper, professor, Department of Emergency Medicine, University of Illinois.

Reduce your chance of being struck by moving inside a substantial building or hard-topped metal vehicle when thunderstorms threaten. Once inside, avoid contact with plumbing, corded phones, or anything plugged into electricity.

"Casualties are more likely to occur during the summer months and in open areas such as golf courses and playing fields, but lightning's deadly strike can hit anytime during the year and in all segments of the nation," said John Jensenius, a lightning safety expert at the National Weather Service Weather Forecast Office in Gray, Maine.

NOAA's National Weather Service is the primary source of weather data, forecasts and warnings for the United States and its territories. NOAA's National Weather Service operates the most advanced weather and flood warning and forecast system in the world, helping to protect lives and property and enhance the national economy.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of the nation's coastal and marine resources.

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On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA's National Weather Service: <http://www.nws.noaa.gov>

Lightning safety tips, survivor stories, multimedia, and other resources:

<http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov>